

# Higher Education Reforms in South Korea:



*Towards ethnocentric internationalisation or  
global commercialisation of higher education?*

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# Profile

- The Republic of Korea has achieved a remarkably high level of economic growth, risen from the rubble of the Korean War into the ranks of the OECD and G20.
- A member of the OECD, South Korea is classified as a high-income economy (**GDP per capita: \$28,000 in 2009**) by the World Bank.
- South Korea is the current **chair of the G-20** major economies and will be the first country in Asia to host the G-20 summit, to be held in Seoul, Nov. 2010.
- It ranks **6th** on the **R&D index**, a measure of research and development expenditures; **10th** on the **human-capital index**, which measures the percentage of people with college degrees; and **13th** on the **scientific-talent index**, which examines the number of researchers per capita.
- **Severe Gender Disparity:** South Korea ranks **61<sup>st</sup> out of 109 countries** in the **GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure)**, which indicates whether women take an active part in economic and political life, and exposes inequality in opportunities in selected areas.
- Major challenges: a rapidly aging population, inflexible labour market, and overdependence on manufacturing exports

(Sources: 2010 CIA World Factbook, McKinsey & Company, Inc, *JoongAng Daily Newspaper*, May 19 2010)

# Higher Education Reforms in South Korea

- Government's proactive decision to meet the challenges from the economic globalisation of HE and the knowledge-based economy.
- Identified challenges:
  1. Increasing global competition for the recognition of world-class universities and ranking;
  2. Increasing global pressures to open up the domestic education market for transnational for-profit HE services to be made available in Korea under the **GATS** and **FTA** negotiations
  3. The labour market demand for a new kind of high-skilled workforce in a context of demographic shrinkage of the student cohort

# Distinctive Features of Korean HE

## 1. Strong Private Sector

The majority of higher education institutions in Korea are private - about 85%.

- 145 out of a total 171 four-year universities and 143 out of a total 158 two-to-three-year junior colleges) are private.
- About 78% of university students and 96% of professional school students enrol in private institutions.

# Distinctive Features of Korean HE

## 2. Government's direct control / regulations over both the public and private HE sectors - i.e. **regardless of funding patterns.**

- ✓ In 1990 the Korean government for the first time began to subsidize private HEIs on a competitive basis to enhance the overall quality of HE.
- ✓ HE costs in Korea are heavily supported by private sector funds. The proportion of government subsidies against the total revenue of universities was limited to 22.7%, much lower than the OECD average (78.1%) and the USA (45.1%) and Japan (41.5%).
- ✓ Overall, **strong uniformity** among HEIs in Korea.  
All – except the SNU – are under the Education Act supervised by the MOE. (Each national institution does not have its own 'charter'.)
- ✓ Underneath the government regulations, there has been strong **egalitarian motif**.

# Distinctive Features of Korean HE

- Overall, it can be suggested that the government has been a regulator rather than a purveyor of higher education in Korea (Kim, 2009).

## **3. The Underfunding of Higher Education in Korea**

- In terms of government funding and regulation, higher education costs in Korea are heavily supported by private sector funds. (Only 3% of private university expenditures come from government funding.)
- Public financial expenditures on higher education as a percentage of GDP are very low at 0.3%, compared to the OECD mean of 1.1%.

## Distinctive Features of Korean HE

4. The **expansion of higher education** has been **led by the private sector** – despite the government's strict and direct regulations over private higher education.
- However, unlike Japan, China, or many other countries (especially those inheriting European university traditions), **the status of private higher education institutions in Korea is not necessarily lower than public institutions** – as in the USA.

## Dominance of Private HEIs in the University League Table in Korea

Among the top 20 universities, only 5 universities –i.e. KAIST (1<sup>st</sup>), SNU (2<sup>nd</sup>), BNU (15<sup>th</sup>), KNU (16<sup>th</sup>), CNU (19<sup>th</sup>) - are national universities.

### University Rankings 2009

By the JoongAng Ilbo

- 1 Kaist (1)
- 2 Seoul National University (3)
- 3 Postech (2)
- 4 Korea University (5)
- 5 Yonsei University (4)
- 6 Sungkyunkwan University (6)
- 7 Hanyang University (7)
- 8 Kyung Hee University (10)
- 9 Sogang University (8)
- 10 Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (11)
- 11 Inha University (11)
- 12 Ewha Womans University (9)
- 13 Chung-Ang University (14)
- 14 Konkuk University (16)
- 15 Pusan National University (13)
- 16 Kyungpook National University (17)
- 17 University of Seoul (18)
- 18 Ajou University (15)
- 19\* Chonnam National University (23)  
Hongik University (19)

\* Two universities ranked in 19th place.



## Distinctive Features of Korean HE

**5. Universalisation of HE** in South Korea: **GER (gross enrolment rate) in HE: 96 %** (OECD, 2009).

- The rapid expansion of HE has led to concerns about the quality of university graduates being expressed by different stakeholders – especially business leaders and students.
- Given the **oversupply of HE**, and the consequently increasing unemployment rate of university graduates in Korea, **the value of HE has come into question.**

## Distinctive Features of Korean HE

6. Government's egalitarian-principled regulations have led to limited educational choices in Korea - **strong conformity and lack of strategic diversification among HEIs**
  - The strong public demand for the best education possible resulted in:
    - a) a continuing increase in the number of Korean student studying abroad; and
    - b) the **diversification of educational migration**

## Distinctive Features of Korean HE

- 7. The high proportion of foreign, especially US-educated academic faculty members in major universities**

However, the foreign academic degrees possessed by Korean university academics have not necessarily meant the internationalisation of Korean HE (Kim, 2005).

## HE Reforms in South Korea over the last 20 years: Neoliberal Economic Globalisation & Internationalisation of HE

- **YS Government (1992-98)**
  - ✓ Political slogan: 'Correcting and rebuilding Korean history'
  - ✓ Globalisation (*Segyehwa*) policies based on popular views such as the rise of a borderless transnational economy, the new revolution in ICT, and lifelong learning
  - ✓ Joining OECD (1996) and yet Asian economic crisis (1997-98) followed by IMF bailout of the country's economy (1998-2000)

## **DJ Government (1998-2003)**

- ✓ New political slogan: 'The second nation-building'
- ✓ Upgraded the Ministry of Education (MOE) to Ministry of Education & Human Resource Development (MEHRD)
- ✓ Universities – following government initiatives went through self reform under internationalisation frameworks - e. g. academic level - courses offered in English have increased; student exchanges and faculty research cooperation actively promoted.
- ✓ Brain Korea 21 (BK21) Project (1999-2005) with the aim of bringing selected major university research projects to 'world-class' level and increasing the competitiveness of local universities: US\$1.3 billion investment allocated to 120 institutions to run 440 projects

# Roh Moo-hyun Government (2003-2008)

- ✓ Internationalisation: Second round of Brain Korea 21 programmes (2006-2013) to finance the selected university research projects, especially in the areas of technology development in collaboration with industry
- ✓ **Egalitarian ethos in policy making** – emphasis on Equality and Fairness in Education - standardization of education
- ✓ Regional balance in development: **NURI (New University for Regional Innovation) Project** – a Korean version of the ‘triple helix’ model of university-industry-regional government partnerships. Only HEIs located outside the capital region can be the beneficiaries of the NURI funds. US\$1.4 billion to be invested over a period of five years (2004-2009)
- ✓ **Restructuring the HE system for concentration, specialisation and diversification in each region through the NURI project**
- ✓ Neoliberal, NPM (New Public Management) principled restructuring process in the HE sector: M & A, increasing the level of specialisation and competition at top universities, Professional graduate schools in Law, Medicine, Engineering, Business Administration, Public Administration and Education, **Incorporation of national/public universities**
- ✓ Neoliberal economic globalisation – GATS, FTA

## Lee Myung-bak (MB) Government (2008-2013)

- ✓ Restructured the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MOEHRD) to make the **Ministry of Education, Science and Technology**
- ✓ Neoliberal NPM - Strong emphasis on **transparency of university management** to enhance **public accountability** – Special Act for the Public Disclosure of Information Regarding Educational Institutions (Law #8825)
- ✓ **World Class University (WCU) Project** – allocation of government funding: US\$ 617 million
- ✓ **‘High risk, high return’ pioneer research project** – government public investment in strategically important areas, especially **basic research and advanced technology R&D** in Biotechnology, Nanotechnology and brain research - increasing government R&D investment by 2012 to KRW 16.6 trillion (KRW 11.1 trillion in 2008)
- ✓ **More pragmatic approaches to internationalisation** – internationalisation of curricula, **proliferation of English-medium courses**, dual degree programmes, joint degree programmes: partner universities are mostly in the USA and China
- ✓ Neoliberal economic globalisation – GATS, FTA
- ✓ Maturing, upgrading its role in the international society – Korea joined the OECD Development Aid Committee in Nov. 2009; chairing G20 in 2010.

# Neoliberal Economic Globalisation: GATS, FTA

- ‘Special Act on the Establishment and Operation of Foreign Educational Institutions’ has:
  - ✓ **Drastically eased restrictions** on the establishment of institutions by foreign universities
  - ✓ Provided foreign-owned institutions with autonomy in deciding the size of their student enrolment, except in certain fields such as pedagogical education and medical studies
  - ✓ **Permitted the transfer of surplus assets overseas** under certain conditions if a school corporation was liquidated – “Plan for Advancing the Education Service Industry” (May 2009); and
  - ✓ **Allowed the Korean government to fund foreign-owned universities.**



Neoliberal Economic Globalisation of HE through GATS, FTA:  
South Korea aims to become an educational hub of Northeast Asia.

- In 2008, the first foreign branch campus in Korea - The Netherlands' Shipping and Transport College (STC-Korea) - opened in Gwangyang Bay Free Economic Zone.
- Several other foreign colleges and universities, mostly American are in discussions to set up academic and research ventures in **free economic zones** - including Incheon (Songdo/Cheongra Area, Pyeongtaek, Busan-Jinhae, Gwangyan Bay, and Jeju Island.
- Under the Songdo Global University Campus Project, the Incheon Free Economic Zone is in negotiations with five foreign universities including North Carolina State University and the SUNY Stony Brook, with the aim of opening branch campuses at Songdo by Sept. 2010.
- The free economic zone is trying to lure these universities by promising rent-free campus buildings and seed money for their initial operating costs during the first five years.



**The Songdo Landmark City** in the **Incheon Free Economic Zone** aims at being a sustainable and futuristic city

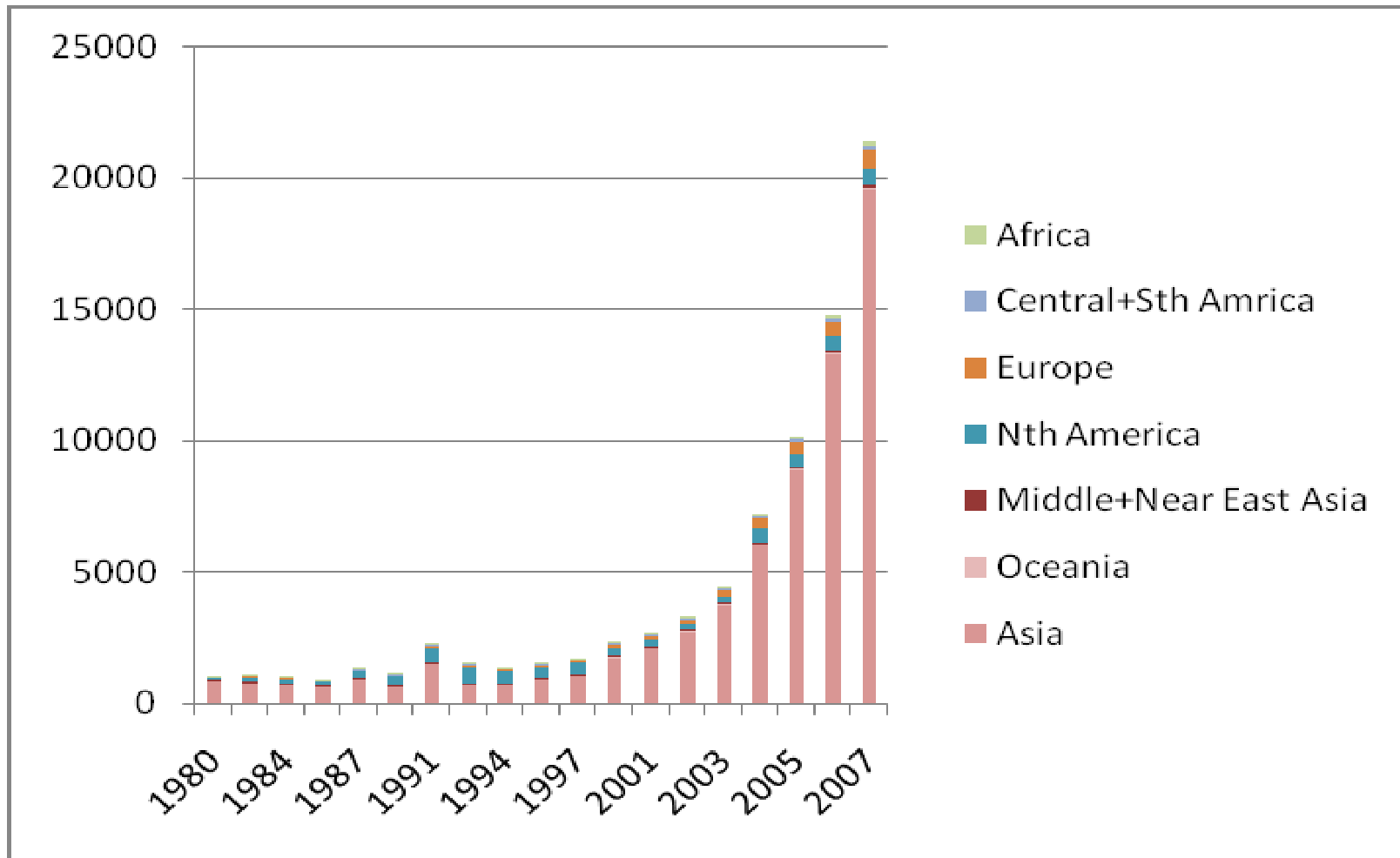


**Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, a prestigious German university, opened the doors to its Busan branch and Research Center for Bio-Chemical Engineering in the Busan-Jinhae Free Economic Zone (May 10, 2010)**

# More pragmatic approaches to internationalisation

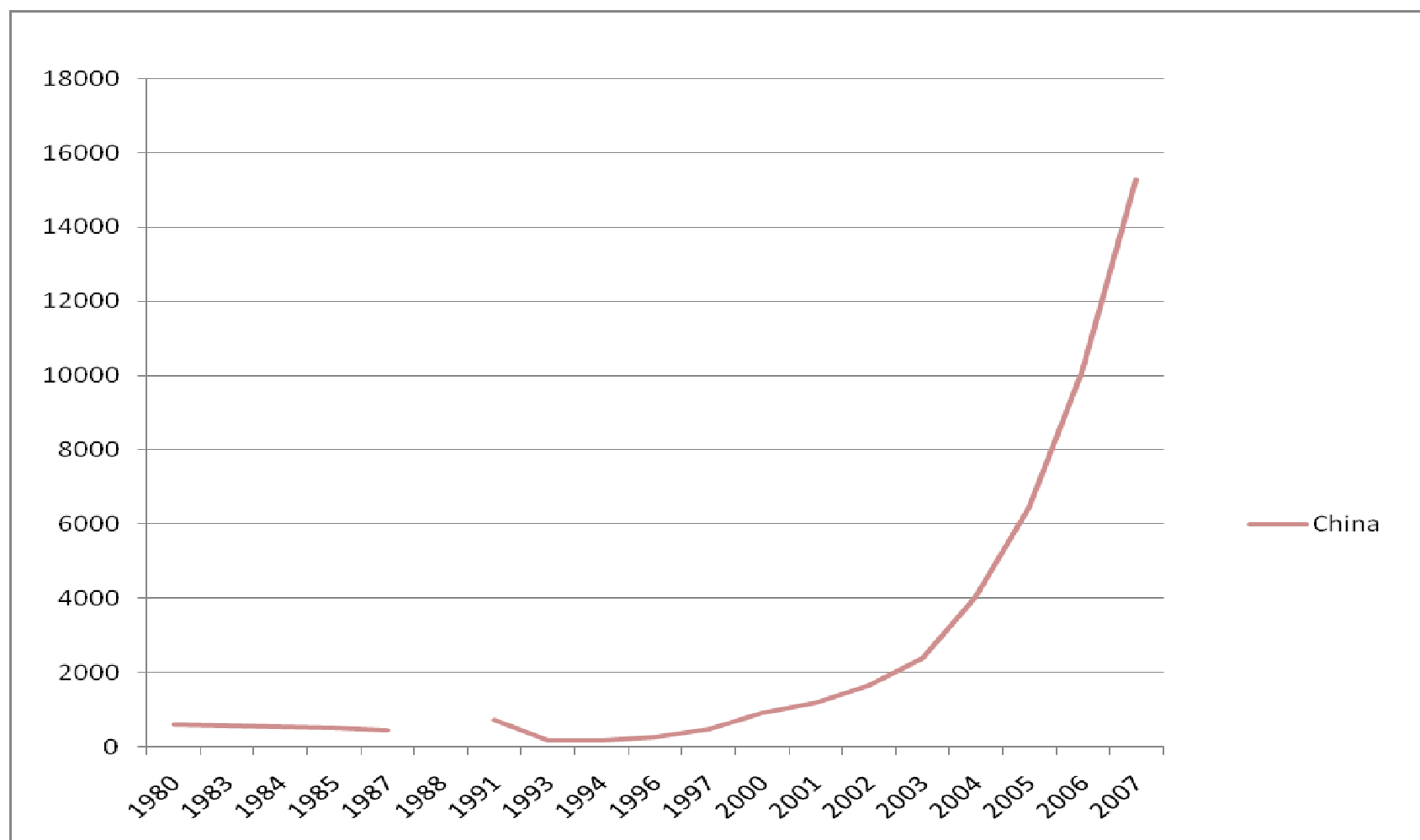
- Internationalisation of curricula, proliferation of English-medium courses
- Top-tier private universities – Yonsei, Korea and Ehwa - have recently established all-English four-year liberal arts institutions to attract both Korean and international students
- Changing condition of international academic staffing: tenure-track positions are finally (!) open to foreign academics. But still most of international staff are employed on a short-term contract basis.

# Numbers of International Students in Korea (by regions)



Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook (1987-2000), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2003-2008)  
[http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF\\_Language=eng](http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF_Language=eng)

# Chinese Students in Korea

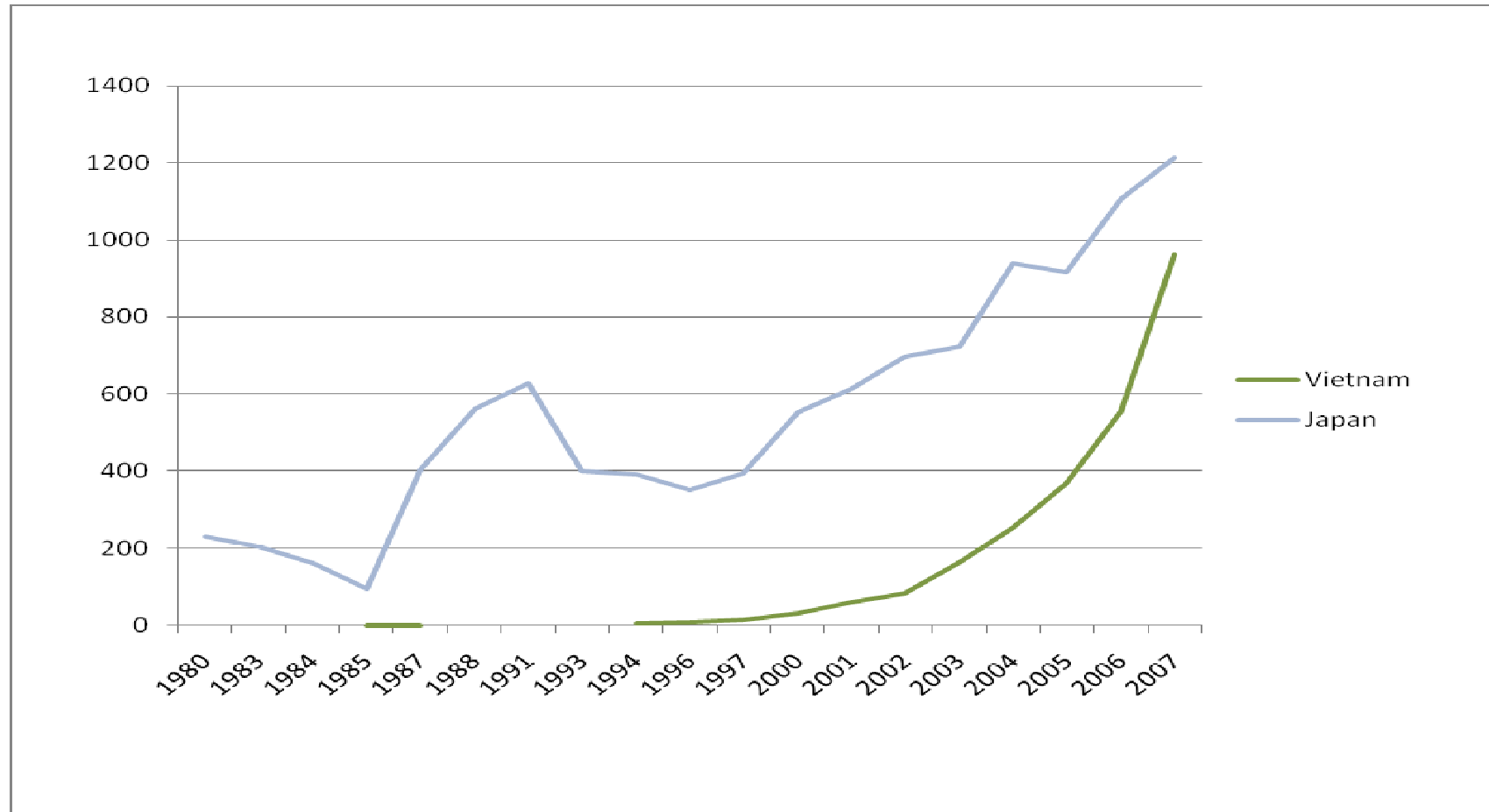


Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook (1987-2000)

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2000-2007)

[http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF\\_Language=eng](http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF_Language=eng)

# Japanese and Vietnamese Students in Korea



Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbook (1987-2000)

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2000-2007)

[http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF\\_Language=eng](http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF_Language=eng)

## Legal-rational boundaries of Academic Mobility

- The government and individual universities are both eager to increase international academic exchange links and to recruit foreign academics and students, as a part of 'internationalisation' policy and practice.
- However, international academic staffing is often considered as a short-term way to meet a policy target.
- Unlike in the UK, USA, Australia, or Canada, foreign academic staff in Korea are **not** employed on the same legal terms as the local staff - no legal protection for equality of job opportunities.
- Similar to the Japanese case, but there is more exclusive ethno-nationalism as boundaries of non-inclusion in Korean academic culture.



*Transnational Academic Mobility (TAM) making*  
**Boundaries**

*Hard*

*Soft*

Legal-rational

Cultural-reflexive

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State  
Authority

Personal  
Adaptation

**Internationalisation  
Policy**

**Interculturality**

# Internationalisation of HE Policy in Korea:

## *ethnocentric and macho approaches (so far)?*

- Given the condition of unchanging regulatory relations of the government-university, the neoliberal concept of public accountability has not been directly interrogated in Korean HE yet.

### **Who owns and who owes accountability to whom in the Korean HE sector?**

- Homogeneity, Conformity within, Social Cohesion **vs.**  
Diversity, Interculturality, Creative international talents (inbound mobility, exchange)
- Despite the strong presence of women in HE (only a small disparity exists between genders in terms of college enrolment), educated women (more than 40%) remain an untapped resource for Korea's future growth.
- Also, be mindful of global commercialisation – homogeneity and commodification of knowledge by means of multicultural, intercultural HE marketing

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**Thank You!**

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